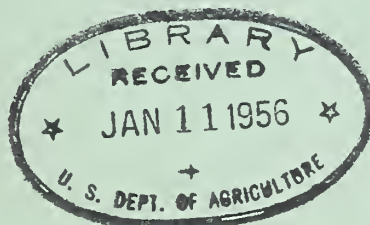


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TRAINING GUIDE FOR LINE OFFICIALS



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Training, like other kinds of management work, can be done in a simple, easy and effective manner. Training, well done, heightens the interest of employees, develops their pride and satisfaction, improves the product or service, and inspires teamwork. Outlined here are suggestions, materials and methods that can be adapted by line officials to fit most any training situation.

The ideas discussed here are in barest outline only. Someone in your office should be assigned to work out the details of your training program and help develop the plan of action. The training staff of the Personnel Management Division stands ready to the limit of its capacity to assist line officials in developing training materials, preparing a plan, and helping instructors prepare to give the training.

Place of Training in Management

Training is one of the most important tools of management. Training is a duty of top management and this duty extends through the chain of command to every first-line supervisor in the organization. Like supervision, training responsibility covers only persons immediately reporting to a superior. Training especially at the higher level is certainly not like schools or academic classes. Most of it is given in staff meetings, administrative details and face-to-face conferences.

Line officials who promptly commend outstanding performance, or ask thought provoking questions of those not so successful, and give challenging work assignments with good instructions, are carrying on high-level training. Group training is used only when the training can be done better and cheaper than by the on-the-job method.

Training thrives best in a climate of good management for the following reasons:

1. By its very nature, training is a function of management. Training can be no better than the management that supports it.
2. The heart of any good training program is the training that each supervisor gives to the persons reporting to him. Group training that does not fit this management pattern is only an auxiliary service.

3. Training to a certain extent takes the place of order-giving and is necessary to get orders carried out properly. When supervisors revel in giving orders, they are not interested in training: conversely, when they are training-minded they are not bossy.
4. Training is not something that can be forced on an unwilling employee or group. Training must be wanted before it can be successful.
5. Training can help cure management ills when it identifies problems and aids in their solutions.
6. There is no point in preserving a haphazard work situation by use of training. You cannot do good training without a broad, clearly written, fullbodied work program pointed to clearly stated and well understood objectives.
7. Good training can be considered a way of life for an organization.

Developing Training Programs

A good work program at the unit level specifies the work to be done by each employee and how it fits in with work programs for the office as a whole. This includes; what work is to be done, who is to do it, when it is to be done, and also some kind of standard of when it is done right. When everyone knows what his job is and is a master of it, there is no need for training. The training program with its plan of action is designed to fill the gap between what each employee knows about his job and what he needs to know. The supervisor can either give this training himself or have someone in his group give the training, or he can send his employee or employees to group training sponsored by the agency. He should be free to choose from the alternatives presented by top management which he thinks is best. After all, he is responsible for the work output of his group. Training is strictly a business proposition. If it does not pay its way, it should not be done.

Because of its close association with the work, training should be planned right along with the work. Whenever there is a change of work, or a change in procedure or practice, training plans should accompany the notice of change. In some cases the training should precede the change. This is one of the instances where group training is often more economical and effective than individual training.

Office heads will often notice that some of their supervisors are doing a much better job than others. Such an observation would suggest a short intensive training program in which all the supervisors could get together and under good leadership explore their problems, and work out solutions. Under this procedure all will get new and useable ideas and the weaker supervisors will see how the better ones carry on their work and thus have a chance to improve.

A review of correspondence and work load reports will suggest the training needed to improve the job. A check of the production and maintenance of equipment will show what is needed for better work. Common errors in vouchers and similar documents will suggest needed instruction. Reports of field men may show that they should be brought together to improve their work. Rotation of employees can sometimes be used as a training device. The work itself therefore directs what training should be given.

Some General Training Policies of Commodity Stabilization Service

1. An employee will be held responsible for learning the job to which he is assigned, but for which he is not fully trained. This responsibility includes cooperating, studying and using the provided training to the best advantage. The supervisor will be held responsible for providing the needed training
2. The training opportunities of staff meetings and other conferences will be fully considered in planning these types of meetings.
3. Work Improvement Programs and the Suggestion System can well be considered as a part of training.
4. Each person in a responsible position will be expected to have, where possible, at least one understudy in training to take over the duties of his job. The understudy or understudies do not necessarily need to know they are the ones in training.
5. Program planning, budget making, accomplishment surveys and similar management functions should be carried on with as much group participation as possible so that they become training media.
6. Where employees have educational deficiencies, they should be encouraged to make up these deficiencies, especially if appropriate courses are available after hours.
7. In cases where an employee does not respond to training, or is manifestly unsuited to the work, arrangements should be made to transfer him to more suitable work where he can perform satisfactorily (in such cases, it is better to talk to the employee rather than about him.)

Some Common Ways and Methods of Doing Training

Staff Meetings: (These suggestions apply to a lesser degree to regularly held status of work meetings held by a chief for control purposes.)

Staff meetings can be one of the most helpful means of work organization and training, or they can be an abject waste of time. Staff meetings are helpful, depending on (a) how badly they are needed, (b) the skill with which they are planned, (c) the way they are announced, (d) how they are conducted, and (e) how they are followed-up.

A guide:

1. Analyze the need for the meeting, determine whether the need is great enough to justify the cost and if the subject to be discussed will challenge the thinking and interest of the members.
2. Outline the purpose of the meeting and develop a list of hard, pointed, searching questions that need to be answered to achieve the purpose of the meeting.
3. Get the announcement, together with the list of questions out to the participants a few days, or at least a few hours, ahead of the meeting.
4. This list of questions becomes the agenda for the meeting. As soon as the questions are answered, together with any others that come up, the meeting is over. The list of questions provides a driving force to get through the meeting and back to other work.
5. Follow-up should be prompt and effective. It is very discouraging to work hard in a meeting, arriving at conclusions or plans of action, and then see nothing happen afterwards.

Many satisfactory variations of this guide can be used to make successful staff meetings. One is to assign topics or problems to staff members ahead of time and let them make a concise report. The Chairmanship of the meetings can be rotated among understudies as a training experience. A proposed plan of action can be developed and copies made available to members far enough ahead of time for them to study it. Occasionally having the next ranking officer above the head of the group attend and participate is good, especially if he uses most of his time for listening. Sometimes a new scientific development, recent discovery, or achievement can be briefly reviewed for the benefit of the group.

It is self-evident that profitable staff meetings require a lot of thought, energy and leadership on the part of the head of a group. A clever head realizes it is better not hold a staff meeting than to hold a poor one.

Use of Understudies as a Part of the
Training Program

Some interesting research has been conducted on the reasons why a person is promoted and rises rather rapidly in a large organization. The study indicated two outstanding reasons or abilities. One was the ability of an individual to prepare himself for the job immediately ahead of him in the organization. Second, was his ability to prepare someone in his group to take his place at any time. This research pointed out that many well-qualified persons were left on their old jobs because they had no one to take their place. As a result, other qualified persons with qualified understudies got the promotions.

The job of selecting and developing understudies is a very difficult process requiring a high degree of judgment, vision and planning ability. It is not necessary to tell the employee, or employees, you have in mind that they have been chosen. There are some advantages to letting them know and there are serious disadvantages. One of the most serious disadvantage is the effect it may have on those not selected. They may feel the understudies are pets of the supervisors and jealousy may result. Also, it is possible that the employee whom the supervisor had in mind may not respond to training and develop as anticipated. Certainly, the chief of the supervisor should know who the supervisor has in mind and the progress the understudy is making. Some of the techniques that have been successful in developing understudies are:

1. Designate the understudy to act in your place as supervisor in your absence, if only for a few hours. Be sure to let the other employees know who is left in charge. If you have more than one understudy, these assignments can be rotated.
2. Assign some of your duties and responsibilities to them on a continuing basis beginning with the minor ones.
3. Ask the understudies for their opinions and suggestions on some impending changes.
4. Assign the preparation of preliminary plans on some phases of the work.
5. Ask them to study problems and come up with suggested solutions.
6. If a promising understudy shows lack of educational qualifications for advancement, point these out and suggest what he needs to do about them.
7. If he has work habits or traits objectional in higher positions, these should be carefully and tactfully corrected if possible.

8. Select profitable reading materials and show him that they are available. Do not require him to read them. What he does is an indication of his ability and initiative.

If a supervisor at a lower level is to be promoted, he should demonstrate his usefulness to his chief. For example, a section chief who gives substantial help to his division chief when he needs and wants it, is in a better line for promotion than one who does not. Therefore, if a section chief is free to help his division chief, he must have some understudy help to carry his load when he is helping his chief.

Organizing Specific Training for Specialized Groups of Employees

The work of an office may require special training sessions for special groups of employees. Some examples of this kind of training are:

1. Public relations training for employees that regularly meet the public.
2. Stenographers and typists in care of typewriter, increased speed and easier ways of using machines, letter writing, English usage and skills in taking dictation.
3. Faster and more comprehensive reading for executives and middle management officials in order to improve their productive power and save their time and energy.
4. Accounting and transportation clerks in improved methods of doing work.
5. Warehouse examiners and other field men in organizing their work, in simpler and easier methods, measuring production, getting along with the public, as well as developing a better professional and technical attitude toward and knowledge of their work.
6. County performance reporters beginning a new year's work.
7. Seminar for professional workers to increase their effectiveness.

Scores of other examples might be given. The demands of the work program and the problems arising from it will dictate the kind of training that should be given. In planning these types of programs, they should be tailor-made to fit the conditions found in the office. The following steps can be taken in designing such a program:

1. The need for training should be carefully examined. What is the general attitude of employees toward their work and towards the office? What is needed to get the best possible performance? What are the causes of ineffective performance?
2. What experience have other agencies had in solving similar difficulties?
3. Get the facts about the work situation, collect illustrations, examples and cases of excellent performance, as well as poor performance. These facts form the foundation on which the training materials are developed. The development of practical case studies that can be fitted into the instructional process should not be overlooked.
4. From the three steps above, design a preliminary plan of action. This plan should contain (a) the kinds of training that are available, organized, and will be given, (b) who will do the training, (c) the materials and methods that will be used, (d) the times and places where it will be given, (e) the approximate cost, (f) and what follow-up will be made to determine effectiveness.
5. This preliminary plan should be reviewed by line officials and training consulting service available.
6. After review and refinement, the plan should be taken up the chain of command as far as necessary to get approval and authority for adoption.
7. Give the necessary instructions and practice to the instructors who will give the training. Off-times, this step may make the difference between success or failure.
8. The supervisors of the persons to be trained should be called together and given a preview of the intended training. On the strength of the preview the supervisors can select the employees that they think should attend.
9. If the ground work is well laid, planning and development expertly done, management has been well sold and instructors well prepared, the training should reach its objectives.
10. One way to check the effectiveness of the training is to pass out a sheet towards the end of the last session. This sheet can contain three questions. They are: What did you like most about the sessions? What did you like least? and, If you were responsible for redesigning the sessions, what changes would you make? The members should be asked not to sign their names and to be frank.

New Employee Training

An employee's future may hinge on what happens to him the first few weeks on the job. Therefore, his introduction to the organization and his early training should be carefully planned and carried out. Because they are so busy, many supervisors assign this training to a reliable, experienced employee. Such an assignment should go to an employee considered as an understudy. When an understudy makes a success in training a new employee, he has mastered the first step in becoming supervisory material. If he cannot train even one new employee, how can he ever hope to become a supervisor? For this reason, a training assignment becomes a real challenge to him to make good. Before anyone begins training a new employee, he needs instruction from his superior. Probably the best way to do this is for the two of them to sit down together and work out an individual training plan.

The plan should indicate what the employee needs to know during the first week. This could well include the following: First, welcome the new employee, make sure he becomes acquainted with others in the office, especially those with whom he will work. Second, quickly familiarize him with the background and the purpose of his work, showing its importance to the whole operation. Tell him how the benefits or services are rendered to the public and the importance of these services. Third, briefly explain the office services, who is in charge, and something of the work of the other people in the office. Fourth, help the new employee understand the nature of his duties, just what he is to do, how to do it, and when it is done right. During this process find out what he already knows about the new work. What he needs to know can then be planned. Fifth, decide the amount of production work that could be expected the first week. Sixth, develop in the employee the habit of taking his requests for information and his problems to you.

The second period, normally the second and third week, set standards of performance. What is a good day's work and his progress. The possibility of an employee being able to go home at night with the realization that he has done a good day's work is one of the greatest morale builders. If he does not know what a good day's work is, how can he be happy?

The rest of the training period is largely one of coaching, guidance, and counselling. The beginner should be convinced of the trainer's own desire to help him become a first class employee. In counselling, it is generally better to listen intently, ask clarifying questions, give information and basic suggestions only. Counsel is something requested and offered. No person giving counsel should be disappointed if his advice is not taken. The person counselled should be made to understand that all decisions should rest with him. Naturally, information gained in counselling is kept in strictest confidence. At the end of the fifth or sixth week, if the employee does not fit into the job, consideration should be given to placing him where he will be more useful and happy in his work. It is a cruel thing to leave an employee in a job for which he is obviously not fitted, not happy or interested.

